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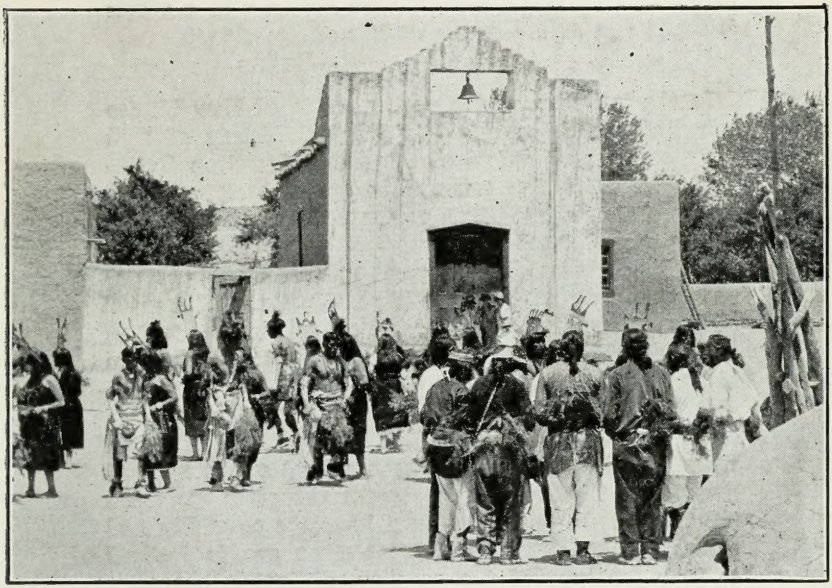

Photograph by Odd S. Halseth

PUEBLO RITUAL AT TESUQUE

A UNIQUE AMERICAN CHRONICLE

By Cecil Romero

"And of yet greater importance is it deeply to know that every beauty possessed by the language of a people is significant of the innermost law of its being."

—Ruskin

In the language of the native people of New Mexico one finds an epitome of the colorful history of that state and, by extension, of the whole American Southwest, for it is the common historical background of the several states of that region that finds expression in the language of these people. In their speech the succeeding phases of that great epic of the Southwest are all clearly reflected so that the musical flow of their soft, apparently alien language becomes, in effect, a unique chronicle of an important part of American history.

It could almost be said of the Spanish language, of course, as Oscar Wilde said of the egg, that it is always an adventure. It is because local variations and nuances of the language are so commonplace—so much the natural thing, in fact, in a language as widely and diversely distributed as Spanish—that one is inclined to take for granted the peculiar, distinctive character of this Spanish of New Mexico. Yet there is a significance in these quaint accents that makes this particular variant of Spanish a most interesting study, and one directly related to some of the earliest and most brilliant pages of American history.

It is often remarked that New Mexico gives one the

impression of agelessness. Whether on the west expanses of its prairies and deserts, or before the geological ages that look down on one from its rugged mountains, or among its changeless human inhabitants—the Indians, one feels here an approximation to that enchanted isle of fable where the ages count as days. And it does not lessen this impression to hear in the mouths of the Spanish people of the region, themselves relative newcomers to this scene, quaint, archaic usages which, according to the chronology of the outside world, are of almost hoary antiquity.

It is no exaggeration to refer thus to such relics of Old Spanish as the aspirated initial "h," the pronunciation indicated in old manuscripts by an initial "f," in such words as "fuir," "fermoso," etc., and long since superseded by the silent "h;" the archaic inflectional forms of some verbs, such as "vide," "vido," etc. from "ver," "truje," "trujo," etc. from "traer" and others; and, besides, the obsolete forms of many individual words, such as "cuasi," "apriesa," "asina," etc. These, of course, are but a few of the most common and striking examples. But they will suffice to convey a notion of the decidedly archaic, old-fashioned quality that characterizes the Spanish of New Mexico and speaks so eloquently of the colorful history of that region.

These obsolete old words and forms have, for instance, a definite chronological value. If we refer to the writings of the two great geniuses of the Spanish language —Columbus and Cervantes—we find that those of the former contain every one of the specific usages cited, and, besides, a general complexion that is strikingly reminiscent of this Spanish that is spoken in New Mexico today; while in those of Cervantes, on the other hand, we find that this obsolete, archaic quaintness has largely, although not yet entirely, given way to the modified

forms of the present. In other word, we do not have to consult the conventional works of history to learn that this quaint idiom of New Mexico was planted here by Spaniards of that eventful century that separated the Great Discoverer and the author of "Don Quixote." And in planting their sixteenth-century Spanish in this remote land of desert and mountains, these Spaniards were also writing some of the earliest pages of American history.

To hear this archaic old Spanish, with its air of a romantic century about it, brings a realization of the fact that these early actors on the American scene belonged to an age of adventure and chivalry that we do not usually think of as related to American history. That they were fired with that same adventurous, chimerical spirit of their times that provoked Cervantes to his immortal satire—that they were, in all reality, prototypes of Don Quixote—is evident. Nothing short of that worthy knight's cavalier disregard for the immense odds against them, and his fertile imagination that could always soar above realities and create enticing illusions further on, could have brought them at that early date this long way into the heart of a wilderness that even in our century was considered formidable.

If further evidence of the truly quixotic spirit of these Conquistadores is desired, we have only to refer to the pages of conventional history. We are told that they came to New Mexico in quest of the "Seven Cities of Cibola," which their vivid imaginations had pictured as splendid cities paved with gold and glittering with gems. It has been supposed that a little group of Indian pueblos near the present site of Zuni was the small foundation of fact on which this imposing structure of

fancy was reared, although archaeologists have been at much trouble to locate as many as seven villages in this group. It seems probable, however, that the actual number of these villages, or even the villages themselves, were quite unessential to this pretty fancy. In all probability it was based on nothing more substantial than that old myth of the "Seven Cities of St. Brandan" that seems always to have intrigued the Spanish mind. It was already a hoary tradition in Columbus' time, and we know it to have been in his mind when he was pondering the westward voyage. Later we hear of its being revived by the explorations of Juan de Grijalva along the coast of Yucatan. And, in all probability, it was also the basis for the wild conjectures regarding the "Seven Cities of Cibola" and the related myth of the "Quivira," which latter will-o'-the-wisp these early Spaniards pursued as far as the plains of northeastern Kansas, turning back only on account of starvation. But, whether suggested by old tradition or entirely the conceptions of their own exalted minds, the chimercial objectives pursued by these American prototypes of Don Quixote were worthy of that ingenious knight himself, from whom they differed, in reality, only in the practical results they achieved.

But perhaps it may seem a far cry from these adventurous, romantic Conquistadores to the present stolid, uninspired Spanish people of New Mexico. And, indeed, the quaint old language is about all that remains to suggest the former glamour. But there is knightly precedent even for this great change that has taken place. It will be recalled that the good Knight of La Mancha, when he suffered defeat at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon, laid aside his arms and vowed he would become a shepherd. In New Mexico the change might not

have been so dramatic, but that is, in effect, what took place.

And just as the rich color and old-time romance of the early period left a hint of themselves in the language of the region, so also is there evidence there of the isolation and prosaic drabness of the succeeding period. But the conditions and influences that were at work in New Mexico during this latter period are represented in the language by the effects they produced, and since it would be tedious to read backwards from effect to cause we shall follow the more natural order, summarizing these conditions and influences first and then noting the effects they have had on the language of the region.

"Whoever wishes to be well acquainted with the morbid anatomy of governments, whoever wishes to know how great states may be made feeble and wretched, should study the history of Spain," Macaulay has said, referring to the decline of that nation from the glory and power and vastness of the empire of Phillip II to its subsequent disintegrated and impotent estate. While the bold, adventurous Conquistadores were planting the banner of Castile in the furthermost corners of the earth and their countrymen at home were dominating the continent of Europe from the Netherlands to Portugal, there was already setting in within that immense body a slow decay that was to sap the vigor, energy and sturdy virtues that for so long characterized the Spanish people. We need not concern ourselves here with the cause or the nature of the malady. Suffice it to say that the adventurous, enterprising spirit of the Spaniard soon gave way to a complacent languor, and the days of conquest and expansion were over.

This reaction left the colony in New Mexico in a pe-

culiarly unenviable position. Far inland, and practically surrounded by formidable deserts or other natural barriers, it was left to an isolation more complete, perhaps, than that of any other settlement in the New World. Even towards its seat of government it was separated from the northern most settlements in Mexico by a wide strip of arid, Indian-infested wilderness that effectively limited communication even in that direction to the minimum requirements of government and a crude commerce. In time so foreign did the people of the two regions become to each other that a Mexican was no less a "tierra-fuereño"—outlander—in New Mexico than an utter foreigner.

Perhaps the natural barriers that surrounded it would not have been so effective had New Mexico had any great wealth to offer. But practically from the first it was mainly an agricultural and pastoral colony which, since it neither sent great wealth to the mother country nor required great expenditures for its support, was practically forgotten at home. Its simple administrative affairs were handled from Mexico, and even there it was probably considered merely as a necessary evil—a buffer colony, as it were, to protect the important mining settlements of northern Mexico.

Left thus for centuries to a self-sufficient existence in that lonely, gaunt land, the inbred descendants of the Conquistadores lost the color and fire of those bold spirits and settled down to the prosaic life of tending their flocks and coaxing a simple living from the thirsty mountain soil. It was a life peacefully primitive, almost patriarchal in its simplicity.

Its changeless, even tenor and isolated loneliness are reflected in the language of the region by the survival there of archaic, obsolete usages that elsewhere disap-

peared long centuries ago. In the absence of new contacts and influences, the quaint old Spanish of the Conquistadores was passed on by one generation quite the same as it in turn had received it from the preceding. In the transmission, which among those simple, unlettered people was necessarily by word of mouth, the language suffered some slight corruptions in the form of misplaced accents and minor mispronunciations. But, on the whole, it remained the Old Spanish of the classical period.

Before passing on to note how changed conditions have marred the antique beauty of this old Spanish, we should pause to consider a slight but significant strain in the language that belongs to this same period we have been considering. It is the trace of the Indian.

It must be remembered that the Spaniards who followed Cortés into Mexico after the Conquest found themselves literally in a New World, in which there were many strange things for which their language had no names. Quite naturally, they borrowed from the Aztecs their names for these things, and, when the Conquest was extended to the North, these Aztec words so borrowed were brought to New Mexico, although in reality they were quite as foreign to that region as the Spanish itself.

In New Mexico, although the Spaniards lived among the Pueblo Indians of the territory for more than two hundred years from the time of the colonization to the time of the American occupation, and dealt with them during all that time, their language shows practically no trace of this contact. This was probably due, partly to the diversity among the languages of the different Pueblos—there being no single one strong enough or general enough for the Spaniards to borrow from— and, partly, to the fact that the Spaniards had already bor-

rowed from the Aztecs in Mexico their names for most of the new things that they found in this New World.

But it will be noted that the Aztec words that are sprinkled through the language of New Mexico are relatively few. And therein lies their significance. In Mexico they have come to constitute such a considerable portion of the language that, of all the variants of Spanish spoken in the New World, the Mexican is perhaps furthest from the original. The Spaniards who colonized New Mexico, on the other hand, did not have time during the relatively short period they were in Mexico to adopt from the Aztecs any really considerable vocabulary. And once in their desert-bound home they were isolated as much from this influence as from any other, so that the infiltration from this source did not continue, as it did in Mexico.

In order not to be unduly lengthy, we shall only cite here the case of the turkey to illustrate this difference between the language of Mexico and that of New Mexico, as regards this Aztec infiltration. The turkey was one of the strange, new things that the Spaniards found in the New World, and, having no name for it themselves, they usually borrowed the local Indian name wherever they happened to be. In Cuba it is called "guanajo," in Venezuela "chumpipe." In Mexico the bird is known by its Aztec name of "guajalote;" but in New Mexico it is called, in good Spanish, "gallina de la tierra," i, e., "chicken of this land" or "native chicken."

These differences we have noted between the language of Mexico and that of New Mexico, both as regards the Aztec infiltration and the preservation of the original old Spanish stock, are plainly significant of a fact that is too often overlooked. Although politically New Mexico was for a long time part of Mexico, socially and

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culturally the people of the two regions had little in common. Even racially they are not so closely related as is commonly supposed, for while the Spanish blood in Mexico suffered a progressive dilution, in New Mexico there was remarkably little intermarriage between the races.

After this quaint old Spanish of New Mexico, with its exotic sprinkling of Aztec, has evoked for us both the stirring romance and the quiet simplicity of a glamourous past, we could almost wish that it were less faithful in reflecting the more prosaic present, and less ominous in its augury of the future. But its signs are too plain to be disregarded, however much we should like to.

There is now noticeable among this hoary old Spanish a growing leaven of incongruous Americanisms. Among the older generation one does not notice them so much, for these older people grew up under conditions that did not differ greatly from those of old. Their isolation was not quite so complete, perhaps; their political status had changed—due to events that were quite foreign to them except in their results; English had become the language of government; and, in general, the old order was passing. But the new conditions were very slow in making themselves felt by the large majority of the people, who, in their little settlements in remote mountain valleys, continued to live under practically the same conditions as their forefathers. And among the few who remain from that period one may still hear the old Spanish of their forefathers spoken with a degree of purity. But among the younger New Mexicans we can see the American leaven working. The number of English words being taken into the language in their undigested, foreign forms, without even an attempt at translation or assimilation, is growing. The old Spanish, hardened during its long isolation into the simple forms of a simple age, would, of course, be inadequate to meet the more complex requirements of the present; and it would have been only natural that these entirely new conditions should have brought to the language a sprinkling of rather incongruous modernisms. But that the process should have gone so far, and should have included entirely unnecessary perversions in such numbers as almost utterly to deface the unique quaintness of the old language, is but another reflection of what is happening whenever the easy-going, yielding indolence and aggressive ways of the new. To see how the once noble breed of the Conquistadores is faring in this clash

is sadly reminiscent of that little Andalusian verse that says:

Aprended, flores, de mi,
Lo que va de ayer a hoy,
Que ayer maravilla fuí,
Y hoy aun sombra mía no soy.*

In few cases have circumstances conspired so effectively to carry a language practically unchanged through three hundred years and one marvels that this unique heritage should be so thoughtlessly dissipated. The only explanation seems to be that the same conditions that contributed to preserving the language contributed also to its corruption. In their isolation the New Mexicans had no way of knowing that their language was in any way peculiar. Even had they known, it is likely that the effort neccessary to safeguard it against the inroads of a new order would have been uncongenial to them. But a consciousness of the value of their heritage might at least have delayed the process of its corruption, and New Mexico might now be able to boast that her savage, desert-bound mountains had preserved the language of Cervantes better than his own Sierra Morena. In fact, with a growing number of qualifications, this could almost be said yet. New Mexico might have to share the honor with some recondite nooks of the Andes, or some isolated parts of the Pampas, but Spain herself would not dispute it. Indeed, so eminent a Spanish scholar as Don Miguel de Unamuno, ex-Rector of Salamanca, has acknowledged that parts of the New World conserve the old Cervantine heritage better than the mother-country herself. And

* Learn, little flowers, from me
What a change the years have made.
Yesterday a marvel; . . . See,
There remains now but a shade.

he adds significantly:"¿Quien sabe si un dia iremos alla a desenterrarla, a reconquistarla?" But señor de Unamuno must lay aside his Spanish procrastination if he would find anything worth reconquering in New Mexico. For the day is not distant when the only Spanish that these descendants of the Conquistadores will know will be what they have learned from American high-school teachers!

Some tardy efforts are now being made to prevent so complete a disappearance of the old Spanish. But they are not impressive. To begin with, in the case of most of these efforts, the preservation of the old Spanish is, in reality only a secondary object. It is either used as a pretext for organizing the Spanish people of the state politically; or it is urged as a means of exploiting the "color" and the "atmosphere" of the old order. And too often, in the latter case, little or no distinction is made between the unique and distinctive old Spanish of New Mexico, and the common-place modern Spanish of the textbooks; nor is such a distinction really necessary, in fact, since it is usually merely the preconceived American notion of what Spanish "color" and "atmosphere" should be that is represented for this purpose, and not an authentic re-creation of the old atmosphere that was distinctively and peculiarly New Mexican. Even more single-minded and discerning efforts, however, would still have to face the fact that the forces at work are deep and fundamental, and are not to be successfully opposed. The march of progress is relentless, and it is fast reducing this last citadel of the old order. In the fall the interesting old language and other vital characteristics of the old atmosphere will be lost; although some of its outward manifestations, such as its picturesque architecture, may still remain to remind a changed world of its debt to achieving romance, fruitful illusion and practical chivalry.

SOUTHWESTERN ARTISTS

Ufer, Higgins, Rush, Sterne in New York

Western painters were to the fore in New York. While Walter Ufer of Taos was at Macbeth's, Victor Higgins of the same colony had a showing at the Grand Central Galleries and Olive Rush of Santa Fe at the Ferargil Galleries.

Taos heretofore has been a bit too vivid and crudely colorful for New York. "The only difficulty with the Southwest, as judged from the results," said the *Post*, "would seem to be that it may be too picturesque. There is so much raw material, as it were, that it does not always get digested." The critic thought that "in all of Mr. Ufer's canvases the objects stand out sharply in the crystalline clearness of the light with a sort of staccato emphasis that the rather hard color and harshness of handling do not relieve. The work, though powerful and able, is insensitive in greater or less degree."

The Herald Tribune and the Brooklyn *Eagle* were more complimentary. The former said Mr. Ufer was "emerging from the rather hard coloristic habit of the Taos group." The latter found that "a certain hardness and thinness of color, which was possibly characteristic of his earlier paintings, and a reflection of the hard, bright sunlight and clear atmosphere of New Mexico, has given way to a new richness of tone without, however, losing in the slightest degree the sense of locality."

The *Sun* said Mr. Ufer "has got over being a tourist and has got over yearning for prizes in public exhibitions," and is "now fitted to do the best work of his career. . . . He has got over the tourist habit of looking for the sensationally picturesque."

Concerning Mr. Higgins the *Eagle* said: "Although his canvases are for the most part straight landscapes, realistic views of the mountains and valleys, beech and aspen groves, rivers and lakes about Taos, his imagination is unquestionably stirred by some primeval quality which they connote for him, and which he manages to convey in a species of realistic symbolism." The *Post* said both his landscapes and still lifes "have a wide range of clear, pure color," but added: "The landscapes seem unstable in their masses of rolling planes; they impress one as puffy rather than solid. Earlier landscapes by Mr. Higgins did not suffer from this effect of floating planes."

The *Sun* said of Olive Rush: "She does modern interiors in distinctly modernistic designs, and she has adapted the old fresco process of Giotto, the Florentine painter and architect. In applying these ancient methods to the best and most durable of modern materials the artist has shown something of the individual development which marks her work in water colors. In her pictures of deer, goats, donkeys, horses and buffalo Miss Rush has done her happiest and most original painting. These combine a striking economy of means with a sensitive feeling for decoration."

The evolution of modernism into classicism and the consequent utter confusion of criticism is well illustrated by the exhibition of drawings and sketches which Maurice Sterne sent to the Reinhardt Galleries from his retreat in the hill-town of Anticoli, Italy. There was a day not many years ago when the name of Maurice Sterne stood for hated innovation in America, yet we find the conservative *Herald Tribune* saying of the drawings in this show:

"They have the merit to which we have already referred, the merit of style, the note of individuality which lifts draftsmanship from mere representational accuracy to

beauty and distinction. They denote a sensitive grasp upon form, a steady feeling for essentials of structure, and that largeness of conception which enables an artist to find a rich eloquence in the modulations of a contour. There is, too, a striking play of light and shade about many of these sketches. Sterne models while he draws. His exhibition is one not to be missed."

The *Post*: "More and more his drawing becomes classic in its severity and in the elimination of distracting detail."

The *Sun*: "He attracts his fellow painters most by just such exhibitions as the present one, for he is an able workman and it is always interesting to them to see how Sterne goes about it. The old definition that 'art is nature seen through a temperament' must be altered in Sterne's case to 'art is nature seen through an intellect,' for his work is intellectual and also art. . . . Three quarters of Sterne's soul is contemporary with Sebastian del Piombo. He is only one-fourth modern." —The *Art Digest*.

MUSEUM EVENTS

March Exhibits

The exhibit of landscape and still life by Edward J. Schmidt gives Santa Fe and its many visitors the first opportunity to gain a comprehensive view of that artist's work. Since locating in the Tesuque Valley several years ago, Mr. Schmidt has from time to time shown a landscape or two, but now he has assembled his best and most mature work into an exhibit filling the walls of an entire alcove. Visitors have been attracted by the vivid coloring and sane treatment of New Mexico scenery,

while artists have pronounced his still life pictures as noteworthy.

The March exhibit of the Modernists in their alcove is again the strongest and most original work shown in the galleries. Outstanding is a portrait by Nordfeldt and a landscape by Bakos but there is fine quality in every painting.

Chopin Concert

A Chopin program rendered by George Columbya in the St. Francis Auditorium on Sunday afternoon, February 26, drew the largest audience yet in the series of ten Sunday afternoon concert recitals under the direction of John L. Nelson. Several hundred people were moved to rapture by Columbya's superb interpretation of the great composer. The pianist's technique was without flaw and yet it was because the performer did not regard rendition of Chopin a purely mathematical exercise that he carried his message without over sentimentalizing.

Garland Visits Museum

Hamlin Garland, noted author, lecturer and scientist, visited the Museum with Mrs. Garland on Monday, February 26. In the evening at a dinner given at Bishop's Lodge and attended by sixty guests, Mr. Garland spoke most charmingly on his impressions and previous visits to the Southwest, his literary work and plans, and his experiments in spiritism. It was an evening never to be forgotten by those privileged to be present through the hospitality of Mr. Jas. R. Thorpe, proprietor of the Bishop's Lodge. It was one of those noteworthy gatherings that are making the Lodge famous.

PLEASANT COMMENT

Supt. Donovan W. Rees of Linn, Kansas, writes "I am writing a Master's Thesis on the Historical Significance of the National Monuments of the Spanish Southwest and find El Palacio one of the best little magazine on the Arts and Sciences of the southwest that comes to my office. Each issue brings something of value in my Graduate research work."

PERSONAL MENTION

Returns from World Trip

Mrs. I. H. Rapp, one of the pioneer members of the archaeological societies and contributors to El Palacio, is the guest of Mrs. N. B. Laughlin after a trip around the world with Mr. Rapp, who is the senior member of the firm of architects who drew the plans for the Art Museum. To a select gathering, Mrs. Rapp gave a delightful, illustrated talg on her observations in the Orient as well as in Europe. On the evening of March 2, she was the guest of honor at a dinner given by Mr. and Mrs. William J. Barker.

NEW MEXICO ARTISTS

Prizewinners Announced

Victor Higgins was one of the prize winners at the annual Indianapolis art exhibit. O. E. Berninghaus and W. R. Dunton were awarded prizes of $100 each at the San Antonio, Texas, art exhibit.

PUEBLO MYTH AND RITUAL

Protest by Dr. Lummis

I hope "El Palacio" will put its foot down at once and emphatically on certain heresies — all ignorant and some dangerous — which I find in advance copies of a new folder about New Mexico.

Of course Christ never was plural! The range is Sangre de Cristo — not "Cristos."

Particularly aggravating — because it sounds "smart" and expert — is an oracle - lady's counterfeit coinage "Puebleño." It is neither smart nor expert, but entirely a joke. There is no such word in any language, and there can not be such a word in Spanish. A skilled writer is entitled to make words in his own language, if he gives them the parentage of Clarity and of Legitimacy. But "puebleño" isn't even a bastard word — it is simply a Doll—mostly sawdust.

Indians who live in pueblos are Pueblo Indians. Pueblo is not a proper name of location — except in Colorado. If it were, it would take a locative, just as Puebla of Mexico and her namesakes do; and an inhabitant of Pueblo Colorado or Puebla Mexico would be in Spanish a "poblano." The verb is poblar, past participle is poblado. First person singular, yo pueblo. This usage of many Spanish verbs is familiar even to tyros — like "poder — yo puedo; volver — yo vuelvo," and so on.

We have had enough butcheries of terms in the Southwest — let's not permit another to get foothold! As for the Pueblo theogonies on page 18, they certainly should not be given circulation among innocent travellers. No Pueblo, except through Christianity, has any concept of a "Great Spirit, a Father-All-Father, who created the Earth and Sky by thinking within himself." Nor is there

any warrant on earth for the statement that man and the animals are thought of by the Pueblos as children of the Earth Mother and the Sky Father and "more or less conditioned by the Twin Brothers of Struggle and Chance!" Oh. Mother!

The structure of the Pueblo creed has been long enough and fully enough established, ever since Frank Hamilton Cushing first found the key. There is no excuse for Smart writers to try to invest these Ancient Aristocrats with an upstart mummery of empty cleverness — like the allegation that the Cacique is often called the "Sun Priest of Souls!" No Cacique ever prayed "first for his own community, then for all the Indians in the world, for all the White People, and for all the Mexicans." It is also absurd to say that the "Pueblos don't believe in death."

The truth is good enough about New Mexico, and about the Pueblos. Their rituals and their myths and their creeds and their whole organization are of a deep and serene beauty which no tinker can improve upon.

I fear that I have made my last visit to dear old New Mexico — and I shall miss it this summer very keenly. But doctors give me a very limited ticket, and while it still runs there is a great deal that I must try to turn out, of the work that it is really a debt of honor for me to do — a debt to New Mexico, and a debt to History and to Science, to pay back as much as I can of what they have taught me, with the "interest" of my own labors in comparing and collating and finding.

But my heart is always over there, and I know I have many blessed friends who will not forget me.

With love and best wishes,

Always your Friend
CHAS. F. LUMMIS